

# **Environmental Assessment For Proposed Action to Capture, Test, and Eventual Disposition of Trespass Horses at Fort Polk, LA**

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

The U.S. Army, Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and Fort Polk, is conducting analyses to determine the potential environmental and socioeconomic effects of a series of proposed actions to support the capture, testing for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), and eventual disposition of trespass horses from the Fort Polk Military Reservation and the Peason Ridge Military Training Area. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Army regulations, the Army is seeking input from interested agencies, organizations, and individuals in determining the appropriate scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA) to include alternative actions and issues of concern to be considered and analyzed.

Fort Polk has a large population of trespass horses. Studies conducted by the Army, legal opinions issued by the United States Department of Agriculture Office of General Counsel, and a recent federal legal settlement regarding the disposition of trespass horses at Fort Polk indicated that these horses are unclaimed horses originating from the open range period in Louisiana. These trespass horses are not subject to regulation under the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burrows Protection Act of 1971.

The State of Louisiana, Department of Agriculture and Forestry has indicated some of these trespass horses may be infected with Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), a disease that can be transmitted to privately-owned horses in the area. EIA is an often fatal viral disease characterized by high fevers, a drop in red corpuscle count, and weight loss. Louisiana state law (Louisiana Administrative Code, Title 7, Part XXI, Section 515) requires annual tests for EIA (known as Coggins tests) for all horses residing within the state of Louisiana. All affected animals must be euthanized.

Additionally, these horses are at continuous risk of injury or death because of ongoing military training activities to include live fire exercises in the Fort Polk training area. They are endangered by training devices such as concertina wire, excavations, live firing of ammunition, and military vehicles. The horses often wander onto airstrips and drop zones posing a potential danger to airborne personnel and aircraft.

It is also appears that the trespass horses have negative environmental consequences on Army-owned lands used for military training activities. The Army has found that the horses can be detrimental to ongoing environmental management activities, such as attempts to control erosion through reestablishment of vegetation.

The EA will evaluate potential impacts associated with a wide range of alternatives in regards to the disposition of the trespass horses. The analysis process will identify affected resources, evaluate effects of the proposed actions on those resources, determine alternative implementation methods, and, if necessary, recommend mitigation measures.

Throughout the analysis and decision-making process, a high priority will be given to the safe, responsible, and humane treatment of the horses.

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No decision on any actions regarding the horses or the disposition of the horses will be made until after completion of the EA and careful consideration of issues of concern and reasonable alternative actions identified by the public, appropriate government agencies and subject matter experts. The Army encourages public input on this issue as well as the participation of animal welfare groups and other subject matter experts in developing an appropriate course of action in regard to this issue. To aid the Army in identifying and evaluating issues and concerns, comments should be as specific as possible. Please submit comments to the address shown below no later than 30 days from the date of this notice so that your comments and ideas can be addressed in the EA.

JRTC and Fort Polk  
Public Affairs Office  
Attention: Mr. Dan Nance  
7073 Radio Road  
Fort Polk, LA 71459-5432

Or by email to [horses@polk.army.mil](mailto:horses@polk.army.mil)

Public meetings will be held in Leesville, LA and Baton Rouge, LA to receive public input on issues of concern and alternative courses of action. The Leesville meeting will be held from 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, April 13 in the Landmark Hotel, 3080 Colony Blvd. The Baton Rouge meeting will be held from 3-6 p.m. Thursday, April 15 in the AmeriSuites Hotel, 6080 Bluebonnet Blvd. These meetings will be conducted in an “open house” type forum at which information booths will be established and public comment forms made available. The public can come and go at their convenience during the three-hour timeframe of the meetings.